THE SUMMIT MEETING
Gen. 12:1-7, II Timothy 1:8-14
Matthew 17:1-9
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Why are we here today? Why are you here? To hear a sermon; to sing a hymn; to pray a prayer; to meet a friend; to participate in a program to which you are committed; to refresh your soul; to get some new insights for daily living? Yes, why? I know one of the reasons I am here, a very evident one, and that is to conduct worship and to preach a sermon. But is that all?

What is this place in which we gather? You answer, "It is a church." But what is a church? You are the church, not the building. The beautiful building in which we meet is only the building in which the church gathers. The early pioneers to this country had their meeting houses. The Quakers still call their places of worship "Meeting Houses". The Israelites wandering in the wilderness called the central point of their life the "Tent of Meeting" or the "Tabernacle".

Have you ever felt deeply with the Psalmist, the Old Testament poet, "As the hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." Is that why you are here, because of a thirst to know God? Have you ever felt deep in your heart that ache that yearns for God, "that I might know Him and the power of His resurrection" as did the Apostle Paul?

Would you be as surprised as was John Denver, playing the part of the grocery clerk in the movie "Oh God", to hear the voice of God, interpreted by George Burns, "This is God speaking"?

I am sure Abraham was surprised also when he heard the voice of God say to him, "Go from your country...to a land that I shall show you." He knew no more than did the grocery clerk in the movie what it would mean to witness for God, to tell the people that God had created the world good and that it would work if we would let it work.

Emil Brunner, the Swiss theologian, wrote a book some years ago entitled "The Divine-Human Encounter". With this title he expounded the Christian faith. The encounter is not just with words, he says, not just ideas, but God in Jesus Christ come to dwell among us, a God-man to live among us, communicate with us, meet with us, meet with us as He finds us after searching for us who are the wanderers and lost.

Abraham had his meeting - the Divine Human Encounter - with this very personal God. It was not just a meeting in general. It was a meeting in a specific place, and at a specific time, with a specific person. And Abraham was given a specific task to perform. "Go out and find that land, occupy it, make it your home, and I will bless you", God seemed so clearly to say, that Abraham went out "not knowing where he was going", says the writer of Hebrews; but he went to establish "a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

I have no clear idea of just how Abraham heard God speak, with what particular words, or with words at all, with what accent, that of his old country, the land of the Chaldeans, or the accent of a new country yet to be established. But he was sure that it was God, so sure that he was ready to leave the old life, the old country, the land he knew well, to go into a strange land among a strange people

where he would have to start all over again. It must have been very real, a true meeting with his Lord. In the Old Testament we have many such accounts. We call them "Theophanies" where God meets with His servants, always symbolic of God's constant presence and concern.

But let us turn to another meeting, one that took place on the top of a mountain in the country which Abraham had, so many years before, occupied on Mount Harman perhaps, or Tabor. We read of this meeting in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus had been with His disciples for several days. Matthew says it was six days after He had told them of the necessity for Him to go to Jerusalem, there to suffer and die. Together with Peter, James and John, Jesus is joined by Moses and Elijah. Here now was the representative of the Law, Moses, and the representative of the Prophets, Elijah, both of whom have recorded in the Scriptures strange accounts of their deaths, if indeed they died at all. Here on the mountain top was joined together the Law, the Prophets and the One who was "full of grace and truth", the One who was "the Resurrection and the Life", the Word made Flesh - Jesus the Christ. Peter seeing the glory of the occasion did not know what to do or say but, as was his nature, could not remain quiet, blurted out "This is wonderful. Let us build here three tents so that we might stay and enrich our lives with this experience. The top of the mountain was covered with a cloud, just like the cloud of God's presence on the top of Mount Sinai with Moses when the Ten Commandments of the Law were given, and the cloud of God's presence that led the Israelites through the wilderness those forty years; when they heard a voice, "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

Martin Luther King knew the meaning of this meeting on the summit of Mount Harmon; "I have been to the mountain," he cried. He had heard the voice. He had met the Lord. He listened, and, I believe, he obeyed. He too went out not knowing where he was going, but in faith traveled the lonely road.

There is still another meeting we must think of today. As we read Paul's words to Timothy did you think of what had given Paul such confidence that he could say, "I know whom I have believed"? Or have you thought seriously how Paul could proclaim with wuch confidence to the Christians in Rome, "I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"?

I am reminded that Saul of Tarsus had a meeting with the Lord on the road as he was traveling to Damascus from Jerusalem. Three times he recounts this meeting in the Book of Acts. He alludes to it in several of his epistles. That meeting was the most important thing that had happened to him and had changed his whole life. He had seen the Lord, and blinded by the sight, had heard Him speak. But as sight was restored he saw things with altogether different eyes, and what he saw took on new meaning.

Our lives are filled with meetings, and you have asked, as I have, I am sure, "Is this meeting necessary, or even important?" At our meetings we so often speak of love, faith, hope, justice in the abstract. Rufus Jones once wrote, "Love in the abstract means nothing. It is as impossible as Alice in Wonderland's cat, grinning without any face." "We are not just created in God's image," says Emil Brunner, "but rather that man is designated and called to a particular relation to God." Again he writes, "To believe in the Holy Spirit is quite different from

having the Holy Spirit take up dwelling in him. The Holy Spirit is to guide him, make him joyous, make him free. He who only believes in the Holy Spirit does not have these activities occur in him."

Note, if you will, what the meetings with God did to those who met Him. Abraham was to travel and establish a land and a nation in a strange land. And he went. Saul of Tarsus had his name changed to Paul, as did Abram in his meeting, to Abraham. He became a new man and was told to proclaim the Good News to the world; and he obeyed. And the disciples, at their summit meeting with the Lord, could not stay in exultation on the mountain top, were not allowed to rejoice in their tremendous experience in isolation. They had to go down the mountain where there was a sick boy in the midst of a crowd of people who were helpless to cure him of his epilepsy, and there enter the struggles of life, the struggles with sickness, suffering, pain, and death.

John McCrae has written that "Christian reality in its essential character is a personal relationship between God and man" and that such a relationship compels us to act upon that established relationship.

It is recorded that Moses met with God on Mount Sinai. He met with God at the burning bush years before. He freed a people and established a nation. He had received orders and courage by meeting God.

Elijah, fleeing from Queen Jezebel and King Ahab, met God who asked, "Elijah, why are you here?" He was afraid and was running away, but the still small voice out of the storm called him back to face the angry king and queen and proclaim to them that God demanded from them just dealing with people.

Saul of Tarsus desperately tried to hold to his past traditions, but deep down found that he "could not continue to kick against the goad" of conscience and justice and rightness. He became a new man, a servant of the Lord to suffer the hardships of prison, shipwreck, beatings and hunger for his Master.

God meets us in all sorts of places, it might even be in the bathroom as it was for the grocery clerk, or in the court room in the movie "Oh God". Martin Luther King met Him as he was climbing steps to a cathedral in Rome, doing the religious thing. It was suddenly made clear to him that the religious act was empty and meaningless, when the words of Scripture broke through the shell of ritual which he found was hollow and had no real meaning.

Father Damien met his Master and heard the voice of the leper crying, "unclean, unclean" and identified himself with the outcasts from society. Finally he himself contracted the dread disease and died from it and is buried with those he served on the Island of Molokai in Hawaii.

Name them, if you will, those who you know have had meetings with the Lord. They are everywhere. I can name some of those who speak to me of their Divine Encounter: Martin Luther King, Abraham Lincoln, Francis of Assisi, John the 23rd, Florence Nightingale, Rufus Jones, Robert E. Speer, William Carey, who was asked to leave his cobbler's bench and go to India as a missionary: Peter Parker leaving his medical practice here to go to China; Sam Higgenbotham, with the skills he had acquired at Ohio State University, to establish an agricultural school in Allahabad, India. It is these and thousands like them, who have changed and are

still changing the world. It started with a meeting with the Lord of the universe, perhaps on the summit of some mountain, with a mysterious voice that spoke to their spirits, and said, "Go out to do the thing I have appointed you to do."

This is a House of Prayer in which we have an appointment with God, He is here. I ask each time I come here and join you in worship, "Do I meet Him here? Do I hear His voice?" And I think that if I do not my trip here is futile and means nothing.

Do you remember seeing a three dimensional motion picture? I recall when we were given special glasses as we went into the cinema. As we watched through those glasses, the action became very personal and direct. It was a Cowboy and Indians picture I saw and I ducked when the arrow seemed to come straight at me. I was sure it was going to hit me. The action was real and personal. My friends, the Christian Gospel is something very personal. It is not enough to profess someone else's faith, to let someone else pull you through life like a diesel engine, a train of cars in which you ride comfortably. There is no power in that for you. Each car must have its power, for sometimes we are very much alone. That experience which you have had somewhere, sometime, perhaps again and again through the years, in all sorts of places, where you met the Lord of Life - I pray right here in this lovely Sanctuary - is not just the adoption of an idea, a dogma, a theological concept. It must be the meeting with a person who loves you, responds to you, hears you, guides you. It is that meeting that gives you power. The Lord of Life came and still comes and dwells among us. If you have not felt that you have ever met Him, then begin doing those things that He has told others to do, others who have met Him; to love mercy, to do justice and to walk humbly with God. In the doing you will come to meet Him for He is there, among the poor, the lepers, the imprisoned, the oppressed, the sick and ignorant. And if we serve Him at the base of the mountain where these people are we will come to meet Him and love Him, and then have strength to meet not only our problems, but to help resolve the world's problems.

The power of the Gospel has not died out. It is we, the disciples, who have forgotten that the Master "is here and calls for us" to meet Him, hear Him, and then follow Him, even to death if necessary. It is so easy to try to stay on the mountain top and enjoy the exhilarating experience of the emotional moment; or to go down the mountain and not see the sickness there.

Sickness surrounds us. Mr. Buchanan spoke a few weeks ago about the evils of pornography and of violence in our day. We could speak of hunger and poverty, of crime and war, of prejudice, injustice, oppression and all kinds of deceit. We cannot escape it. The meeting with God in worship, as we perceive His majesty and His mystery, is made known to others only as we face the sick and diseased and stretch out the heart that has met the Lord, and bring healing. This is the test of our personal faith - I am inclined to say it is the only test. Not words and phrases but deeds of compassion and love.

Have you been to the mountain and met your Lord? If you have, then join the myriads of devoted followers of the Christ in obedient service at the base of the mountain, and with prayer and fasting cure the sickness. This is our task, our privilege and the glory of the Gospel. That is truly the Good News of God's meeting with His people.